

things that you will read about in the days ahead.

I don't want to give a political talk tonight. I just want to tell you that, at a very personal level, this was a wonderful 10 days for us, and we are grateful to all of you. This has been a great time. This is a great family place. I wish everyone in America could see it, but at times I thought everyone in America was here already. *[Laughter]*

I'd like to ask Hillary to come up and say a word on behalf of our family, and I want

to thank you again. And we want to get out here and shake a few hands before we leave, but I want Hillary to say a word or two.

[At this point, Hillary Clinton expressed her thanks.]

The President. Thank you very much. Bless you. I hope we'll see you again. Thank you so much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:36 p.m. at the Martha's Vineyard Airport.

Remarks at a White House Interfaith Breakfast August 30, 1993

Thank you. Thank you very much. I want to once again, as the First Lady did, welcome all of you to the White House on behalf of Vice President and Mrs. Gore and Hillary and myself. We're delighted to have you all here.

We wanted to make this new beginning by beginning with a group of religious leaders from all faiths and parts of our country to come here today as we rededicate ourselves to the purposes for which we're called here.

I wanted to make just a couple of brief remarks. We've had an immensely interesting conversation at our table about some of the things which are dividing Americans of faith as well as those which are uniting them. I would say to you that I am often troubled as I try hard here to create a new sense of common purpose. All during the election I would go across the country and say that we're all in this together. Unless we can find strength in our diversity, our diversity of race, our diversity of income, our diversity of region, our diversity of religious conviction, we cannot possibly meet the challenges before us. That does not mean, in my view, that we have to minimize our diversity, pretend that we don't have deep convictions, or run away from our honest disagreements. It means that we must find a way to talk with respect with one another about those things with which we disagree and to find that emotional as well as the intellectual freedom to work together when we can.

A couple of days ago, when I was on vacation—let me say, the most important religious

comment made to me this morning was that several of you gave me dispensation for my vacation. You said I did not need to feel any guilt for taking a little time off, so I appreciate that. *[Laughter]* But I bought a book on vacation called "The Culture of Disbelief" by Stephen Carter, a professor at our old alma mater, Hillary's and mine, at the Yale Law School. He is himself a committed Christian, very dedicated to the religious freedoms of all people of faith, of any faith, in the United States. And the subtitle of the book is "How American Law and Politics Trivialize Religious Devotion." And I would urge you all to read it from whatever political as well as religious spectrum you have because at least it lays a lot of these issues out that I am trying to grapple with.

Sometimes I think the environment in which we operate is entirely too secular. The fact that we have freedom of religion doesn't mean we need to try to have freedom from religion. It doesn't mean that those of us who have faith shouldn't frankly admit that we are animated by the faith, that we try to live by it, and that it does affect what we feel, what we think, and what we do.

On the other hand, it is very important that, as Americans, we approach this whole area with a certain amount of humility, that we be careful when we say that because we seek to know and do God's will, God is on our side and therefore against our opponent. That is important for two reasons. One is, we might be wrong. *[Laughter]* After all, we're only human. The

other is that the thing that has kept us together over time is that our Constitution and Bill of Rights gives us all the elbow room to seek to do God's will in our own life and that of our families and our communities, and that means that there will be inevitable conflicts; so that there will never be a time when everything that we think is wrong can also be illegal. There will always be some space there because there will have to be some room for Americans of good faith to disagree.

I think we need to find areas where we can agree and work together on. The restoration of religious freedoms acts is a very important issue to me personally. And this administration is committed to seeing it through successfully. And I think virtually every person of faith in this country, without regard to their party or philosophy or convictions on other issues, agrees with that. So we are hopeful that that will happen. But there must be other areas in which we can meet together and talk together and work together and frankly acknowledge our agreements and our disagreements.

If people of faith treat issues about which they disagree as nothing more than a cause for a screaming match, then we also trivialize religion in our country. And we undermine the ability to approach one another with respect and trust and faith. And I say that not just to those who disagree with me on some of the particularly contentious issues but also to those who agree with me. Every person in this country who seeks to know and do the will of his or her Creator is entitled to respect for that effort. That is a difficult job, difficult to know, even harder to do. That is hard work.

But people that have that level of depth, that aren't totally carried away by the secular concerns of the moment must, it seems to me, find a way to talk and work with one another if we're ever going to push the common good. We can't pass a health care program without a conviction that this is in the common interest, that over the long run we will all win. If this becomes some battle where I'm trying to slay some dragon of special interest and that's all it is, we'll never get where we want to go. The American people have to open their hearts as well as their minds and figure out, this is this horrible problem. We have to solve it. But we have to solve it in a way that enables us to be united together.

We can't work our way through a lot of these economic problems unless we frankly admit that

we're moving into a new age where no one has all the answers. We may have to modify, all of us, our specific policy positions. But our goal should be to enable every person who lives in this country to live up to his or her God-given potential. And if we look at it that way and frankly admit we're in a new and different era, then we can go forward.

We can't possibly do anything for anybody in this country unless they're willing to also do something for themselves. There has to be a new ethic of personal and family and community responsibility in this country that should unite people across the lines of different faiths and even different political philosophies. And the people of faith in this country ought to be able to say that, so that if you say that you've got to have that sort of revitalization at the grass-roots, person by person, that the Democrats can feel comfortable with saying that; no one says, "Oh, you're just being a rightwinger." It's just simply true, it is self-evidently true: You cannot change somebody's life from the outside in unless there is also some change from the inside out.

So these are the kinds of things that I've had a lot of time to think about over the last few days. And I have felt in the last several months during my Presidency that we often-times get so caught up in the battle of the moment, the heat of the moment—how are you going to answer this charge and make that change or deal with this difficulty—that sometimes we forget that we are all in this because we are seeking a good that helps all Americans. There must be some sense of common purpose and common strength and, ultimately, an end which helps us all, that revels in the fact that there are people who honestly disagree about the most fundamental issues but can still approach one another with real respect, without assuming that if you disagree on issue X or Y, you've jumped off the moral and political cliff and deserve to be banished to some faraway place.

So I wanted to have you here today because I wanted you to hear this direct from your President. I wanted to ask you to continue to pray for me and for our administration, and I wanted to invite you to be part of an ongoing dialog, which we will come back to all of you later on, talk about how we can continue to involve people who care about their citizenship as well

as about their relationship to their God and how we can work through these things.

There are no easy answers to this. The Founding Fathers understood that; that's why they wanted us to have the first amendment. There are no simple solutions. But I am convinced that we are in a period of historic significance, profound change here in this country and throughout the world and that no one is wise enough to see to the end of all of it, that we have to be guided by a few basic principles and an absolute conviction that we can recreate a common good in America.

But it's hard for me to take a totally secular approach to the fact that there are cities in this country where the average murderer is now under the age of 16. Now, there may not be a religious answer to the policy question of whether it's a good thing that all these kids can get their hands on semiautomatic weapons. But there certainly is something that is far more than secular about what is happening to a country where we are losing millions of our young people and where they shoot each other with abandon and now often shoot total strangers for kicks, shoot at them when they are swimming in the swimming pool in the summertime.

So I believe that we have enormous possibilities. I think we have enormous problems. There will always be some areas of profound disagreement. What I would ask you today to do is to, as I said, to pray for us as we go forward, to be willing to engage in this dialog, to reach

out to others who may disagree with us on particular issues and bring them into the family of America, and to give us a chance to find common ground so that we can build a common good and do what all of us in our own way are required to do. For I believe that each of us has a ministry in some way that we must play out in life and with a certain humility but also with deep determination.

So I thank you for being here. This has been a wonderful morning for me and for all of us. And I ask you to think about these things and to be willing to continue to engage in this dialog. We have a lot of work to do to lift this country up and to pull this country together and to push this country into the 21st century. And we have serious responsibilities beyond our borders. Every day there is some good news in the press about that—some of you have been talking about the Middle East, how many times we thought we had good news and been disappointed, but better than the bad—and every day there is some frustration. So we have to go forward with a much deeper sense of shared values and togetherness toward the common good than we've had so far. That is what I seek to do and what I ask for your prayers and guidance and support and involvement, active involvement, to achieve.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:03 a.m. in the State Dining Room at the White House.

Remarks and an Exchange With Reporters Prior to a Meeting on Flood Relief and Hurricane Emily

August 30, 1993

The President. Let me say, I asked that James Lee Witt to come in this morning to provide to me and to the Vice President and to our senior staff a briefing on Hurricane Emily and what provisions we're making to be ready for that and as well as to give me an update the—how we're handling the aftermath of the flood damage in the Midwest. And as you know, there was more flooding in Iowa yesterday.

So those are the two things we're going to be talking about, and I thought I would maybe just let Mr. Witt say a word or two and then you may have a couple of questions.

[At this point, Federal Emergency Management Agency Director Witt made brief remarks.]

Middle East Peace Talks

Q. Mr. President, changing the subject for a second. The Palestinians and the Israelis appear to have some historic breakthrough involving perhaps mutual Israeli-PLO recognition. If the Israelis and the PLO recognize each other, will that result in the U.S. resuming its dialog with the PLO?